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Sir:

Transmitted herewith for filing is the patent application of

Inventor: Douglas B. Quine

For: SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR FOWARDING ELECTRONIC MESSAGES

Enclosed are:

Thirteen (13) pages comprising the specification, claims, and abstract.

Six (6) sheets of drawing.

A Declaration and Power of Attorney.

A Recordation of Assignment Request and an Assignment of the invention to Pitney Bowes Incorporated, 1 Elmcroft Road, Stamford, Connecticut 06926-0700.

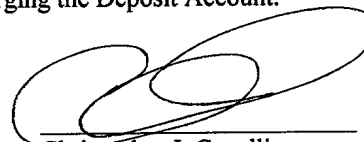
Fees calculated as follows:

Basic Fee						\$ 690.00
Claims Fee	Number Filed		Number Extra		Rate	
Total Claims	9	- 20 =	0	X	\$18.00	\$ 0.00
Independent Claims	2	- 3 =	0	X	\$78.00	\$ 0.00
Multiple Dependent Claims					\$260.00	\$
Total Filing Fee						\$ 690.00

Please charge our Deposit Account Number 16-1885 in the amount of \$ 690.00 for the filing fee.

The Commissioner is hereby authorized to charge any additional fees which may be required, or credit any overpayment to Account Number 16-1885.

A copy of this Transmittal Letter is enclosed for use in charging the Deposit Account.


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SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR FORWARDING ELECTRONIC MESSAGES

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to a system and method for forwarding electronic messages, and more particularly, relates to forwarding e-mail messages intended to be initially delivered to an obsolete or disfavored address to a chosen forwarding address associated with the obsolete e-mail address.

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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Recent advances in telecommunications networks have drastically altered the manner in which people interact and conduct business. These advances promote efficiency and convenience in one's ability to receive important information. With this in mind, individuals and businesses today find that their physical and electronic addresses are changing faster than ever with increased mobility and competing message delivery services. Deregulation and privatization of the global postal systems, competing package delivery services, and rapid growth of multiple competing electronic mail (e-mail) systems are creating an environment in which there is no single point of contact for address correction as there was when the sole messaging provider was the national postal service.

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Users who enjoy the benefit of sending and receiving e-mail messages typically subscribe to an Internet Service Provider (ISP) offering such e-mail capabilities (e.g., America Online (AOL), Netcom, and Redconnect) and/or may subscribe to an internet based e-mail service (e.g., juno, rocketmail, yahoo) which each is associated with a particular e-mail address. Thus, the e-mail address is unique to the e-mail service provider. The uniqueness of an address to a selected provider is often apparent on the face of the address, e.g., DQuine@aol.com, Quine@juno.com or DouglasQuine@yahoo.com. A user or subscriber to a particular e-mail service may from time to time desire or need to change service providers (e.g., from DQuine@aol.com to QuineDo@pb.com). Exemplary motivation for these changes may derive from the fact

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that an alternative service provider charges lower rates, or the existing provider's inability to upgrade its service.

A user who desires to change from one e-mail service provider to another suddenly faces the reality of being bound to the old service provider because the user's address is unique to that one provider. A sudden and complete changeover is in many circumstances impossible because the community of people who wish to send electronic messages to the user are only aware that the old address exists. For example, an e-mail address may be published in an industry directory that is only published once every year or two years. Alternatively, the e-mail address may be printed on a business card which cannot be retracted and corrected. Thus, the user incurs a potentially significant loss of prospective business by abandoning the old address.

Currently, there is no effective means in place for address correction of e-mail addresses. Even if the e-mail sender is highly diligent, there are no resources or processes available to identify corrected electronic address information. The problem is further accentuated by the fact that extreme competition in internet service providers, and likewise e-mail service providers, results in extremely high obsolescence of e-mail addresses with no means for e-mail forwarding (e.g., closing an AOL e-mail account provides no option for forwarding e-mail intended for that account to a new e-mail address).

Further, today's web savvy users may have multiple e-mail addresses which periodically change as new features develop or are lost. Entire domain names can be lost (e.g., lostdomain.com) and all mail directed there may be lost as well. In either case, typically the MAIL DAEMON message is returned to the sender, notifying the sender that the e-mail address cannot be found and e-mail message is being returned to the sender.

Some service providers offer their user-subscribers the option of a message forwarding service. These forwarding services operate by receiving the incoming message, retrieving the portion of the incoming message that identifies a selected user who subscribes to the forwarding service, associating the selected user with a forwarding address through the use of a lookup table, and transmitting the message to the forwarding address. The forwarding services differ from the normal message delivery service that the central service provider offers because a portion of the forwarding address belongs to

another central service provider. Thus, the forwarded message is actually delivered to its intended recipient by the other or second service provider, i.e., the forwarded message passes through two central service providers, as opposed to just one provider. The intended message recipient is free to change the second provider with regularity provided that the recipient always informs the forwarding service of each change in the second provider. However, this message forwarding system only works with viable e-mail address, that is, the e-mail address associated with the first service provider must still be active and not obsolete. In fact, few e-mail services offer forwarding services and few, if any, offer to forward e-mail after the account is closed. Otherwise, the first service provider is only enabled to send the later mentioned MAIL DAEMON message back to the original sender of the -e-mail message.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Accordingly, the present invention relates to a method and system for forwarding an e-mail message intended to be delivered to a first e-mail address to a second e-mail address in the event the first e-mail address is disfavored. An e-mail forwarding computer is located at a third e-mail address that is programmable to associate disfavored e-mail addresses with forwarding e-mail addresses.

In use, a user at a first computer sends an e-mail message to a first e-mail address at a second remote computer. When this e-mail message is returned to the user at the first computer, the user resends the e-mail that was originally addressed to a first e-mail address to a second e-mail forwarding computer that is capable of forwarding the e-mail message to a second e-mail address. The second computer receives the e-mail message and parses the first e-mail address from the e-mail message to determine if there is a second e-mail address associated with the first e-mail address. If there is a second e-mail address associated with the first e-mail address, the second computer sends the e-mail message to a third computer associated with the second e-mail address.

Thus, an advantage of the present invention is that there is no cooperation needed by the e-mail server associated with the disfavored e-mail address. That is, if an e-mail address becomes disfavored (it is no longer an active e-mail address) either because the associated e-mail server ceases to exist, or the e-mail account has been left abandoned for

a host of reasons, the present invention e-mail forwarding system nevertheless operates because no cooperation is needed from the later e-mail server. An additional benefit is that when an e-mail message is forwarded by the present invention, the privacy of the recipient is protected because the sender of the e-mail message is preferably not notified of the recipient's forwarding address.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The above and other objects and advantages of the present invention will become more readily apparent upon consideration of the following detailed description, taken in conjunction with accompanying drawings, in which like reference characters refer to like parts throughout the drawings and in which:

Fig. 1 depicts an electronic e-mail messaging system embodying the present invention;

Figs. 2 and 3 depict flowcharts depicting the operation of the present invention;

Fig. 4 depicts a look-up table used by the present invention; and

Figs. 5A and 5B depict e-mail messages illustrating the operability of the e-mail messaging system of Fig. 1.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

FIG. 1 schematically depicts a conventional INTERNET telecommunications system 10. The FIG. 1 system is exemplary in nature. The present invention can be implemented as program control features on substantially all telecommunications service provider systems, and system 10 is intended to represent any operable telecommunications system that is used by any telecommunications service provider in conducting communication operations (e.g., facsimile, pager, mobile phone and PDA computers).

It is to be appreciated that the term "INTERNET" is well known in the art as designating a specific global international computer network that operates according to the TCP-IP protocol. A portion of the INTERNET receives or has in the past received funding from various United States governmental agencies including ARPA, NSF, NASA, and DOE. INTERNET communications protocols are promulgated by the

Internet Engineering Task Force, according to standards that are currently set forth in RFC 1602.

Telecommunications system 10 includes a plurality of user or signal origination sites 12, 14 and 16, with each site being depicted in reference to a PC capable of generating and transmitting e-mail messages, wherein each site 12, 14 and 16 corresponds to a specific telecommunications address. A user may utilize one site or a plurality of sites. A single city or local service area may have millions of these signal origination sites. Each site 12, 14 and 16 corresponds to a telecommunication address that belongs to an individual, business, and other entity having need to avail themselves of telecommunications services.

It is to be understood that preferably each origination site 12, 14 and 16 feeds its signal (addressed to a subscriber identified at a selected service provider) to an internet service provider 18 (ISP), which in turn preferably feeds the signal to a local router node 20 that directs the local signal to a relay system, e.g., the INTERNET cloud 22, which transmits the signal to a router 24 through a series of relays. The signal eventually arrives at an internet service provider 26 through router 24.

As can be seen in Fig. 1, a plurality of destination sites 28, 30, 32, 38, 40 and 42 are shown connected to internet service providers 26 and 36 with each site being depicted in reference to a PC capable of generating and transmitting e-mail messages, wherein each site corresponds to a specific telecommunications address. It is of course to be appreciated that telecommunications system 10 includes a plurality of routers (e.g., routers 24 and 34 with each internet service provider being connected to a plurality of user sites (e.g., PC's 38, 40 and 42).

In accordance with the present invention, telecommunications system 10 additional includes a messaging forwarding system 44, which as will be further discussed below, enables e-mail messages to be automatically forwarded to a forwarding address, which forwarding address is associated with a currently undeliverable e-mail address. Messaging forwarding system 44 preferably includes a PC 46 connected to an internet service provider 48, which PC 46 is provided with a unique e-mail address (corrections@emailangel.com) and software programmed to perform the below described

steps necessary to operate the present invention e-mail forwarding system 44. Internet service provider 48 is preferably connected to INTERNET 22 via router 50.

As shown in Fig. 4, system 44 includes a software program that includes a look-up table 50, which is programmable by users to provide an e-mail forwarding address 52 associated with pre-programmed defunct (undeliverable) e-mail address[es] 54. It is to be appreciated that users of the present invention e-mail forwarding system 44 may access and program the look-up table 50 of system 44 through any conventional known means, including via the internet 22 in which a user at PC site 28 accesses the look-up table 50 in system 44, via the internet 22, via routers 24 and 50, and internet service providers 26 and 48. Look-up table 50 may include a plurality of defunct subscriber addresses (54+N), with each defunct address being associated with one or more forwarding addresses (52+M)

It is to be appreciated that in this description of the present invention system 44, mention is made to both a "user" and "subscriber" of system 44. It is to be understood that a "user" of system 44 refers to anyone who is capable of transmitting an e-mail message and accesses system 44 when it is desired to forward the message to a forwarding address, which forwarding address the sender is unaware of. A "subscriber" of system 44 refers to anyone who subscribes to the e-mail forwarding service of system 44 in which the subscriber registers both a defunct e-mail address 54 and at least one e-mail forwarding address 52 with system 44. And of course e-mail forwarding system 44 is accessible by any user.

In illustration, if a subscriber of system 44 closes an e-mail account (e.g., user@oldaccount.com) for what ever reason, the subscriber may however still desire to continue to receive messages sent to that address (e.g., user@oldaccount.com), but now wants to receive those messages at a different account (e.g., subscriber@newaccount.com). In the prior art, to accomplish this the subscriber had to resort to informing everyone who had the old e-mail address (e.g., user@oldaccount.com) of the new e-mail address (e.g., subscriber@newaccount.com). In accordance with the present invention, the subscriber now merely accesses the subscriber's designated account in system 44, via any known means such as the internet, registers the defunct e-mail address (e.g., user@oldaccount.com) and associates it with a desired forwarding e-

mail address (e.g., subscriber@newaccount.com). Thus when a sender of an e-mail desires to transmit a message to a subscriber of system 44 but only knows the subscriber's old e-mail address (e.g., user@oldaccount.com), which account is no longer active, the user now merely looks to system 44 to forward the message to an active account (e.g., subscriber@newaccount.com), as will be discussed further below.

As indicated above, FIG. 1 is exemplary in nature, and those skilled in the art understand that equivalent substitutions of system components can be made. For example, electrical communications over conductive telephone lines, optical communications over optical fibers, radio communications, and microwave communications are substantially equivalent for purposes of the invention. Likewise, messages could be relayed through e-mail, facsimile, pager, PDA device or other capable communications system.

The method of use of system 44 will now be described with reference to Figs. 2, 3 and 5 in conjunction with Fig. 1. Referring now to Fig. 2, when an email sender 14 desires to transmit a message to a recipient 30 having a known e-mail address (e.g., quine@luv-npi.com) of the recipient, the sender 14 transmits the e-mail message 500 (Fig. 5a) through conventional e-mail protocol, whereby the message is delivered to the identified mail server 26 (e.g., luv-npi.com) of the recipient 30, via the senders ISP server 18 (step 100). The recipient's 30 mail server 26 then receives the e-mail message (step 102), and if the e-mail account is valid (e.g., quine@luv-npi.com) (step 104), the e-mail message is then accessible to the view and thus considered delivered (step 106). If the account is not a valid account (e.g., quine@luv-npi.com) then the identified e-mail server 26 (e.g., luv-npi.com) rejects the request (step 108) and sends a MAIL-DAEMON message 510 (Fig. 5b) to the sender's 14 e-mail server 18 indicating that the message is not deliverable (step 110). The sender's e-mail server 18 then sends a message to the sender 14 that the attached e-mail message is undeliverable.

Since the sender 14 cannot contact the recipient (e.g., quine) via the now defunct e-mail address 54 (e.g., quine @luv-npi.com), the sender 14 is presented with the problem of how to contact the recipient. In order to overcome this problem, the present invention e-mail forwarding system 44 provides a solution by forwarding the e-mail message to a new address so long as the recipient 30 (e.g., quine) subscribes to the

forwarding service of the system 44. In the current illustrative example, the recipient (e.g., quine) registers the defunct e-mail address 54 (e.g., quine@luv-npi.com) with the system 44 and instructs the system to forward all messages to a specified forwarding e-mail address 52 (e.g., quine@docsense.com), as depicted in the look-up table of Fig. 4.

5 Returning now to the sender's 14 situation in which the sender 14 still desires to transmit the e-mail message 500 but does not know the correct e-mail address. In accordance with the present invention, the sender 14 now forwards the entire message 510 that was previously sent to the intended recipient's defunct e-mail address (e.g., quine@luv-npi.com), and rejected, to the e-mail address (e.g.,
 10 corrections@emailangel.com) assigned to the e-mail forwarding system 44 (step 200). The e-mail server 48 (e.g., emailangel.com) that received the message then informs the forwarding system 44 of the receipt of this message and afterwards the forwarding system 44 receives the message from the e-mail server 48 (step 202). The forwarding system 44 then parses message 510 and extracts the intended address for the recipient
 15 (e.g., quine@luv-npi.com) from the message (step 204). The forwarding service 44 then does a look-up in table 50 for the intended address (e.g., quine@luv-npi.com) to determine if this address has been registered by a subscriber in the forwarding system 44 (step 206). If no, system 44 sends an e-mail message back to the sender 14 informing the sender 14 that the defunct address of the recipient 30 (e.g., quine@luv-npi.com) is not
 20 registered with the forwarding system 44 (step 208). If yes, forwarding system 44, sends the e-mail message 510 addressed to the recipients defunct address 54 (e.g., quine@luv-npi.com) to the recipient subscriber's new e-mail address 52 (e.g., quine@docsense.com) as prescribed in the look-up table 50 of the forwarding system 44. Preferably, forwarding system 44 then sends an e-mail to the sender 14 indicating that the message original
 25 addressed to a defunct e-mail address has now been properly forwarded.

 Thus, a clear advantage of the present invention e-mail forwarding system 44 is that a sender merely forward a rejected e-mail message to the e-mail address (e.g., corrections@emailangel.com) associated with the forwarding system 44 to determine if the previously rejected message can be forwarded to a proper e-mail address. And if it
 30 can, the forwarding system automatically forwards the message to an e-mail address as prescribed by the recipient. Thus, a user of system merely has to forward a rejected e-

mail message to forwarding system 44 to utilize its forwarding services. Therefore, no internet access is required, only access to an e-mail server is required which is quite advantageous since many e-mail users only have access to an e-mail server and not an internet server, such as staff employees in corporations and home users who utilize free, or inexpensive e-mail services. Furthermore, in contrast to directory services, the system design preserves recipient privacy by not providing the new e-mail address to the sender.

In summary, an e-mail forwarding system having a dedicated e-mail address for automatically forwarding e-mail has been described. Although the present invention has been described with emphasis on particular embodiments, it should be understood that the figures are for illustration of the exemplary embodiment of the invention and should not be taken as limitations or thought to be the only means of carrying out the invention. Further, it is contemplated that many changes and modifications may be made to the invention without departing from the scope and spirit of the invention as disclosed.

What is claimed is:

1. A method for forwarding an e-mail message from a first e-mail address to a second e-mail address, the method comprising the steps of:

sending an e-mail message from a first computer addressed to a first e-mail address to a second computer at a third e-mail address;

receiving the e-mail message at the second computer associated with the third e-mail address;

parsing the first e-mail address from the e-mail message in the second computer to determine if there is a second e-mail address associated with the first e-mail address; and

sending the e-mail message from the second computer to a third computer associated with the second e-mail address.

2. A method as recited in claim 1 further including the step of sending an e-mail message to the first computer from the second computer indicating that the e-mail has been sent to the second e-mail address.

3. A method as recited in claim 1 further including the step of sending an e-mail message to the first computer from the second computer indicating that the e-mail message was not forwarded to another e-mail address if another e-mail address is not associated with the first e-mail address in the second computer.

4. A method as recited in claim 1 wherein the parsing step includes the step of comparing the first e-mail address to a look-up table to determine if the first e-mail address is contained in the look-up table.

5. A method as recited in claim 1 further including the steps of:

sending an e-mail message from the first computer addressed to a first e-mail address to a third computer at the first e-mail address; and

receiving the e-mail message at the first computer with a message indicating that the e-mail message was not delivered to the third computer at the first e-mail address.

6. A method as recited in claim 1 further including the steps of:

accessing the second computer by a user of the first computer having the first e-mail address; and

associating the first e-mail address with at least the third e-mail address in the first computer.

7. A method for forwarding an e-mail message from a first e-mail address to a second e-mail address, the method comprising the steps of:

sending an e-mail message from a first computer addressed to the first e-mail address to a third computer at the first e-mail address;

receiving the e-mail message at the first computer with a message indicating that the e-mail message was not delivered to the third computer at the first e-mail address;

sending an e-mail message from a first computer addressed to the first e-mail address to a second computer at a third e-mail address;

receiving the e-mail message at the second computer associated with the third e-mail address;

parsing the first e-mail address from the e-mail message in the second computer to determine if there is a second e-mail address associated with the first e-mail address, wherein the parsing step includes the step of:

comparing the first e-mail address to a look-up table to determine if the

first e-mail address in contained is the look-up table; and

sending the e-mail message from the second computer to a third computer associated with the second e-mail address.

8. A method as recited in claim 7 further including the step of sending an e-mail message to the first computer from the second computer indicating that the e-mail has been sent to the third e-mail address.

9. A method as recited in claim 8 further including the step of sending an e-mail message to the first computer from the second computer indicating that the e-mail message was not forwarded to another e-mail address if another e-mail address is not associated with the first e-mail address in the second computer.

ABSTRACT

A method and system for forwarding an e-mail message intended to be delivered to a first e-mail address to a second e-mail address in the event the first e-mail address is disfavored. An e-mail message is sent from a first computer that was originally addressed to a first e-mail address to a second computer that is capable of forwarding the e-mail message to a second e-mail address. The second computer receives the e-mail message and parses the first e-mail address from the e-mail message to determine if there is a second e-mail address associated with the first e-mail address. If there is a second e-mail address associated with the first e-mail address, the second computer sends the e-mail message to a third computer associated with the second e-mail address.

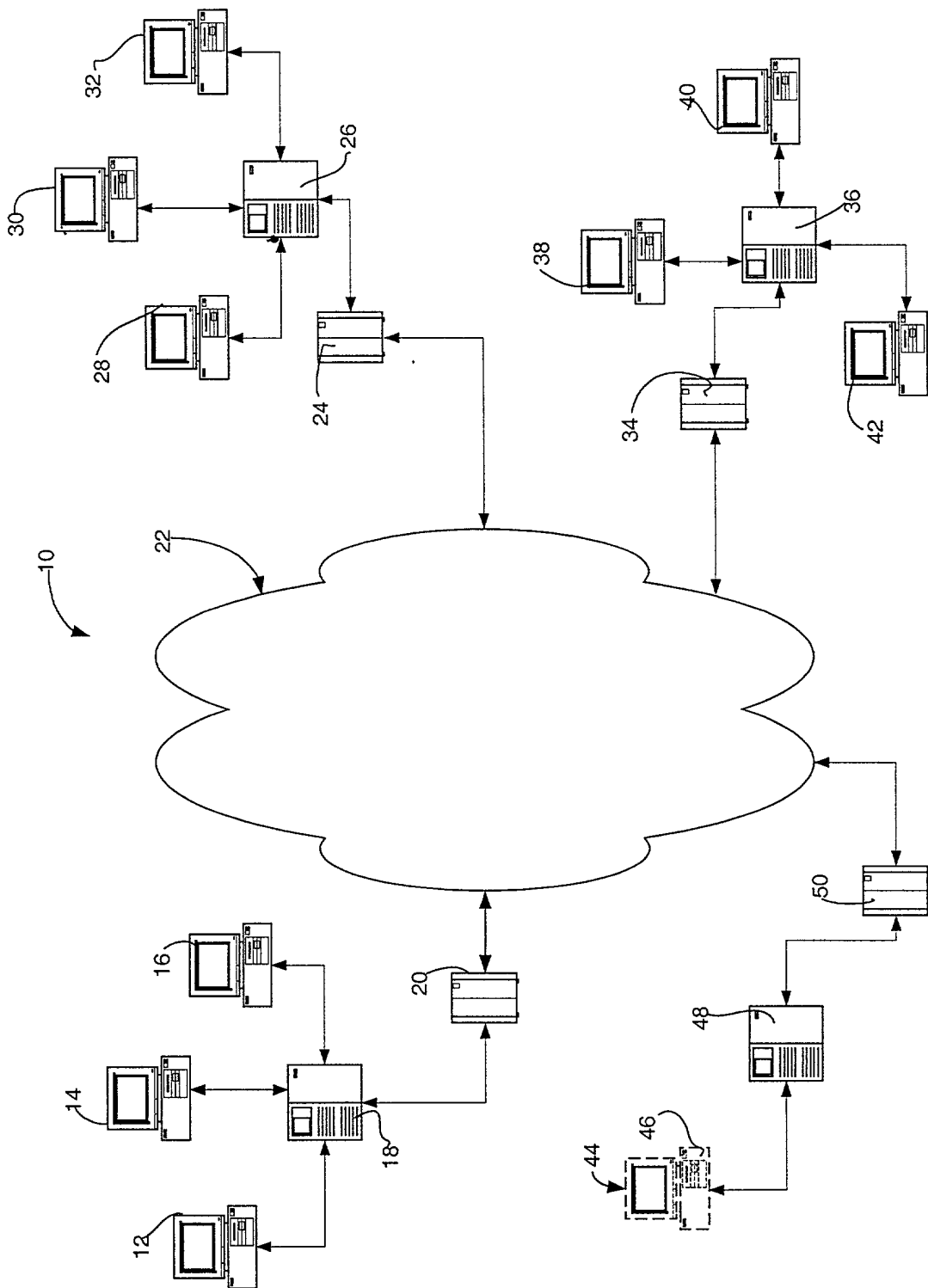


FIG. 1

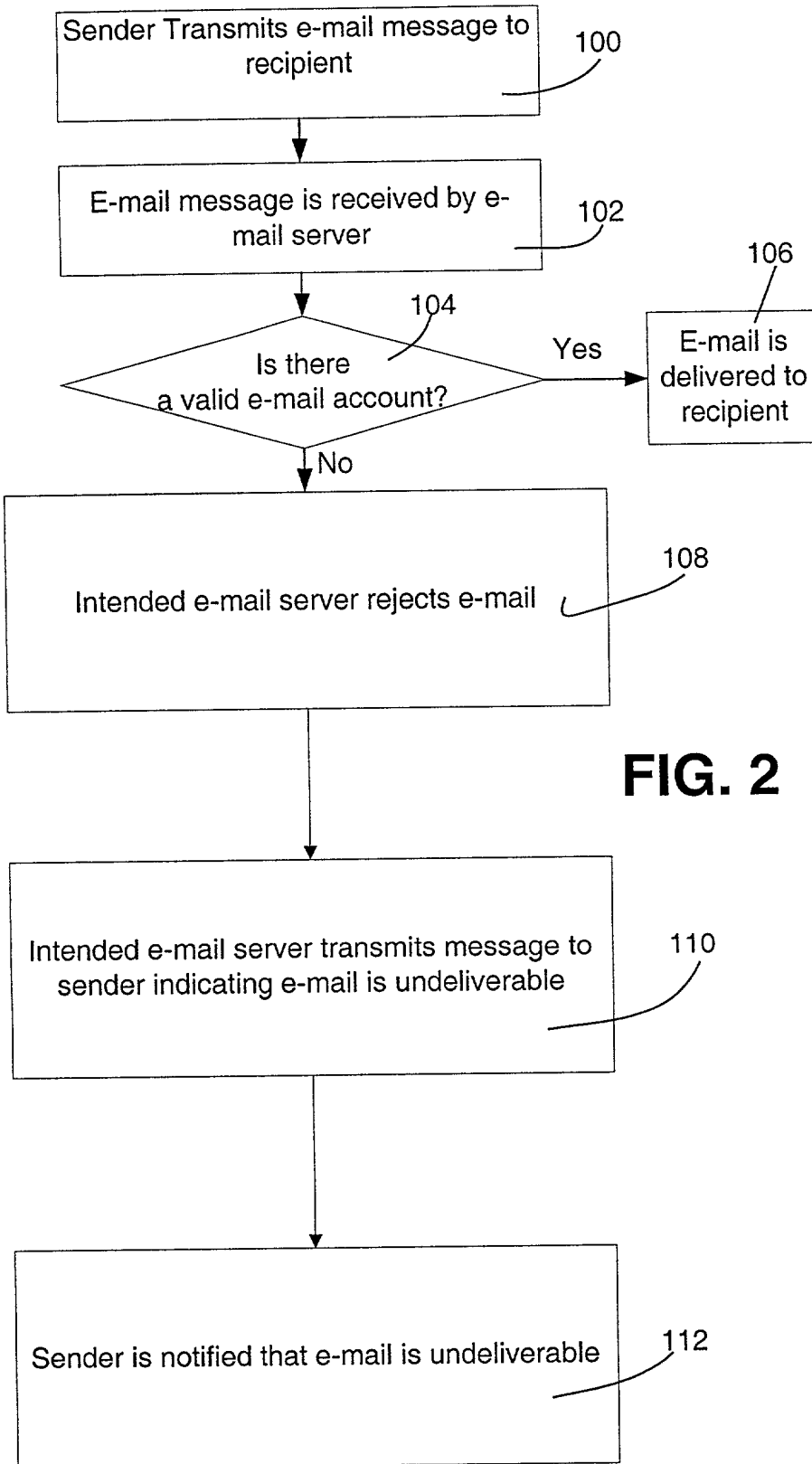
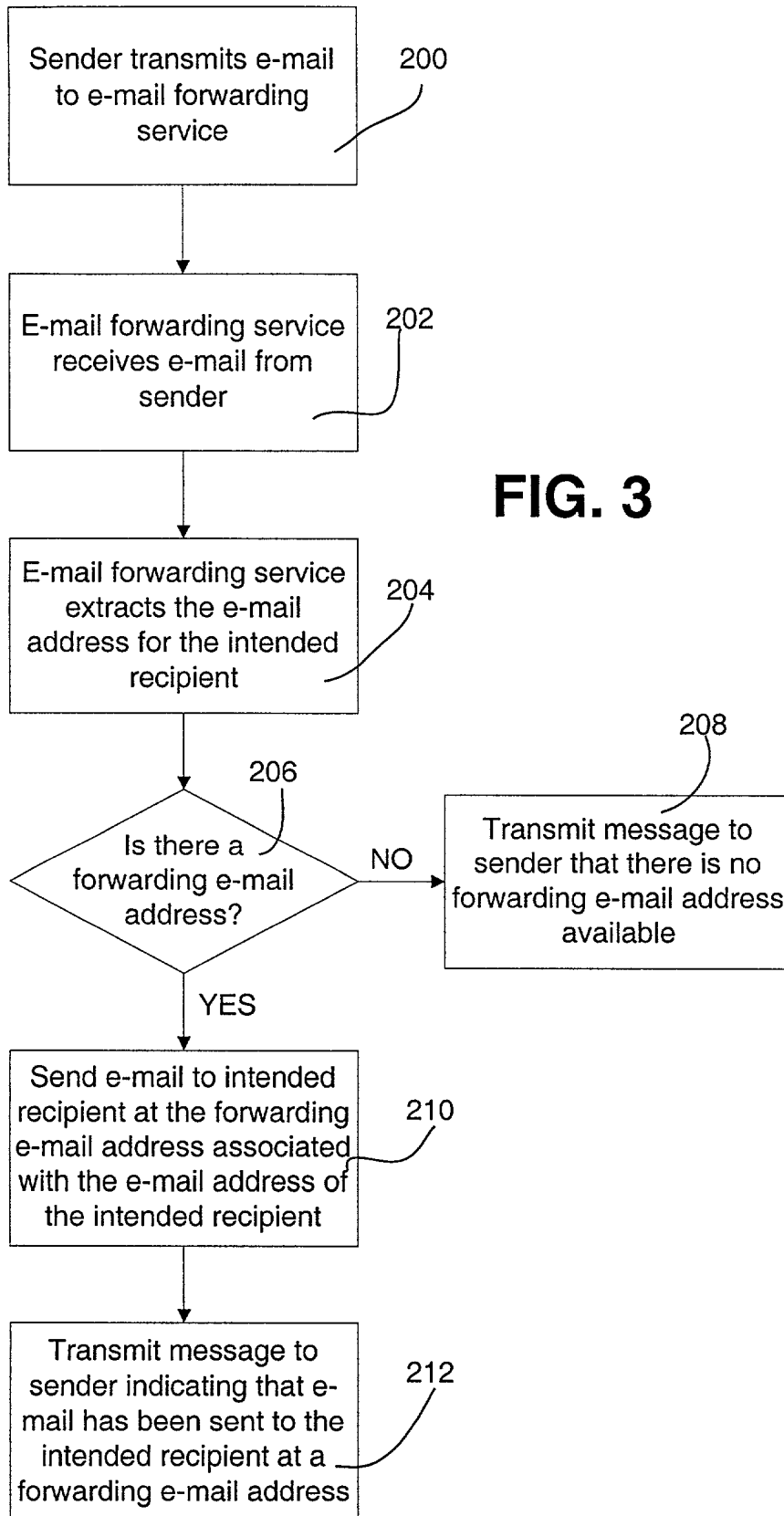


FIG. 2



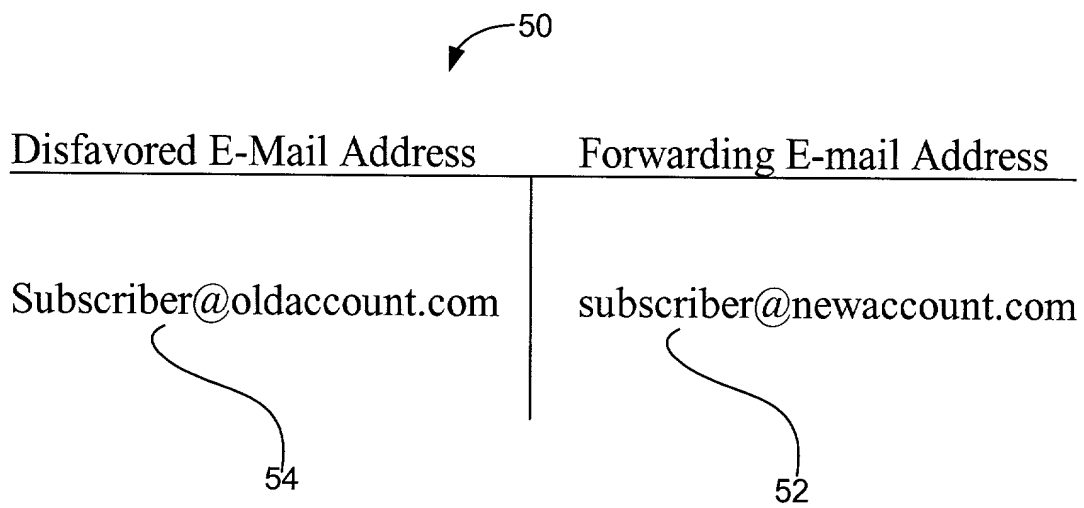


Fig. 4

500

TO: DQuine@luv-npi.com

RE: Hello

I have not communicated with you in a long time -
how is everything?

Fig. 5A

510

Delivery Failure Report

Your document: Hello
was not delivered to: dquine@luv-npi.com
because: The specified address contains a
host or domain name that could not be found by
the Domain Name Server or local hosts file.

TO: DQuine@luv-npi.com

RE: Hello

I have not communicated with you in a long time -
how is everything?

Fig. 5B

DECLARATION AND POWER OF ATTORNEY
Patent Application

Attorney's Docket Number
E-176

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As below named inventor, I hereby declare that:

my residence, post office address and citizenship are as stated below next to my name;

I believe that I am the original, first and sole inventor of the subject matter which is claimed and for which a patent is sought on the invention entitled

SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR FORWARDING ELECTRONIC MESSAGES

described and claimed in the attached specification;

I have reviewed and understand the contents of the above-identified specification, including the claims;

I acknowledge my duty to disclose to the Patent and Trademark Office all information known to me to be material to the patentability of this application as defined in Title 37, Code of Federal Regulations, section 1.56; and

I do not know and do not believe the invention was ever known or used in the United States of America before my invention thereof, or patented or described in any printed publication in any country before my invention thereof or more than one year prior to this application, that the invention was not in public use or on sale in the United States of America more than one year prior to this application, that the invention has not been patented or made the subject of an inventor's certificate issued before the date of this application in any country foreign to the United States of America on an application filed by me or my legal representatives or assigns more than twelve months prior to this application, and that no application for patent or inventor's certificate on this invention has been filed in any country foreign to the United States of America prior to this application by me or my legal representatives or assigns.

I hereby appoint the following attorneys and/or agents to prosecute this application and to transact all business in the Patent and Trademark Office connected therewith;

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Reg. No. 26,307

DECLARATION AND POWER OF ATTORNEY
Patent Application

Attorney's Docket Number
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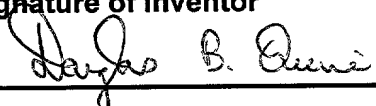
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Signature of Inventor 				Date July 26, 2000